

COMMUNICATION TIPS for VETERANS

Start with listening – Make it your goal to fully understand your partner before sharing how you feel.

Try using restatements – Example: “So what I’m hearing you say is you feel frustrated when I ask to leave 30 minutes after we arrive.”

Ask clarifying questions – Example: “I know how I felt, but what was your experience?”

Show empathy – Example: “I can see why you would feel hurt. I would feel hurt too if I thought someone was intentionally ignoring me.”

Reflect on your experience – Example: “I feel anxious when I don’t hear back from you on our plans. I would like to hear back from you by the end of the day.”

Consider your tone and body language – Are your words saying one thing but your eyes, tone and posture another? Check your volume. Sit down if your partner is sitting. Turn towards your partner (without crowding). Look at your partner when they’re speaking.

NEED TO TAKE A TIME OUT?

TIME OUT is a strategy to help you control yourself and the situation when conflict arises. Specifically, when you feel yourself becoming irritated or that your buttons have been pushed, you STOP and give yourself a TIME OUT by physically removing yourself from the situation to prevent it from escalating.

Know the signs your body tells you that it is time for a TIME OUT. When you start to feel your muscles tensing, the back of your neck getting hot, racing heartbeat, or elevated voice... your body is trying to tell you that you feel threatened. TIME OUT is a strategic choice to diffuse the situation in a way that leads to a resolution of the conflict.

FOR SUCCESSFUL TIME-OUTS:

- Don’t wait until you are in the heat of an argument to take a TIME OUT. Storming out of the room, getting in the last word, or using it to silence your partner are NOT examples of an effective time out.
- Discuss the terms of TIME OUT before you find yourself in the middle of a disagreement.

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You can learn specific, effective ways to make requests, say “no,” give feedback, set boundaries, and more.

Don’t hesitate to seek help if arguments turn into name-calling, put downs, threats, or physical violence. Call 911 in an emergency.

To learn more about the Intimate Partner Violence Assistance Program, call your local VAMC’s Intimate Partner Violence Coordinator:

Ashley Harrison, LCSW
Kimberly Helm, LCSW
352-548-6000

**24/7 Help: National Domestic Violence Hotline:
1-800-799-7233 or TTY 1-800-787-3224**



HOW TO USE TIME OUTS

Your TIME OUT AGREEMENT should specify:

- **HOW TO SIGNAL THE TIME OUT?** A gesture or code word so it’s clear to each partner that you are initiating a TIME OUT.
- **WHERE ARE YOUR “NEUTRAL CORNERS”?** Negotiate approved TIME OUT spaces and or activities.
- **HOW LONG WILL THE TIME OUT LAST?** Don’t force the other person to end the TIME OUT if they are not ready.
- **HOW TO END THE TIME OUT?** When you’re ready to talk, approach your partner and ask if they are ready, too. Give them some space if they are not, but negotiate a time to meet back. Make sure there are no frustrations or distractions when you prepare to talk.

DURING THE TIME OUT:

- Cool off and calm yourself. Exercise/walking, deep breathing and meditation can help.
- Ask yourself what is making you so angry, why is it pushing your buttons?
- Think about how you can communicate your needs to your partner in a respectful, loving way.
- Prepare to come back to the conversation open to hearing what your partner needs to say to you.